MARY: Pls. file this within a triplecut FILE FOLDER, inside the I.R. file. Thx.

9 August, 1983

IDEAS RIDING FILE

[CONFIDENTIAL]

Videogame:

The question is how to design a home video game which would teach a great deal of astronomy in a context as exciting as most violent video games. We can imagine the nearest few thousand stars present in the computer memory with their accurate three-dimensional positions, a large number of other objects such as the Orion Nebula, the Crab Nebula, globular clusters and so on -- even if the model galaxy were much smaller than the real one -- a hundred thousand stars, for example, instead of ten billion. Ideally the game would occur over such a long period of time that stellar evolutionary events would have to be taken into account. If the goal depended on pattern recognition, the general geography of the Milky Way Galaxy could be taught expeditiously. The size of the galaxy makes it a natural arena for a game in which something is lost and must be found. There are two natural starting points -- (1) when we begin on the Earth and have to find something elsewhere in the Milky Way; and (2) when we start outside the Galaxy or at the center of the Galaxy and our job is to find the Earth. Whether we imagine faster than light travel or merely a radio search, it is important to have a graph which shows us barreling through space with various astronomical objects streaming by. From the galactic starting point the idea would be to find the youngest civilization in the Galaxy in order to help it before it destroys itself -- which most of them generally do. If the starting point were the Earth, the goal would be to find the nearest galactic civilization. Civilizations -- at least some of them --

should have small colonial empires a la Newman and Sagan. Civilizations of much greater powers should also exist, including at the center of the Galaxy. The most obvious tie-in of such a game is to CONTACT. I'm not sure whether this is two separate games, CONTACT 1 and CONTACT 2, or just one game with two modes.